

CWD UPDATE

March 7, 2003

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission reports that all results from samples collected during the 2002 deer season have been returned. A total of 4,200 samples were submitted; of these, 4,162 did not test positive, 12 tested positive and 26 were not testable due to deterioration of the sample, wrong tissue collected or the animal being shot in the head area. Six of the positives were from Sioux County, three from Morrill County and three from Kimball County, all located in the panhandle of Nebraska in our endemic area. We have also collected an additional 27 samples from the area around the cluster of three positives in Morrill County to determine the extent of the disease in that area. We will continue to cull animals in that area in an attempt to collect 50 additional samples for testing. The results of the 27 are pending.

Texas Parks and Wildlife have reported that they collected 1,405 samples during the deer season for CWD testing. Of these, the results of the first 1,085 were all negative with 320 pending. Some of the samples included exotic cervids, common in Texas. Additionally, TPWD will be collecting deer in the Franklin Mountains near El Paso to determine if the CWD findings in the Organ Mountains in New Mexico have extended into Texas. The Organ Mountains are just a few miles from the Franklin Mountains.

In spite of objections from some citizens, the Boulder County Commissioners in Boulder, Colorado have approved a plan for the Colorado Division of Wildlife to collect 50 deer in the city's open space to test for CWD. The unanimous vote came after over 2 hours of debate by citizens. Most Commissioners stated that, although it was a difficult decision, they felt they should go with the experts, the CDOW, and allow the action in an effort to stanch the spread of CWD.

CWD and a growing elk population in Rocky Mountain National Park are causing federal officials to re-evaluate its 35-year-old policy of letting nature regulate the population. The park superintendent stated that it is time for the Park Service to take an active role in managing the population, especially in the light of CWD being present in the Park. A new management plan for the Park's elk will be developed with assistance from neighboring landowners, villages and the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

Test result news from Wisconsin continues to be good, with positives only found in the eradication zone or the management zone in the southwest part of the state. To date, 26,232 of 39,636 samples have been run with 62 positives. The newest positives included three from the eradication zone and one from the management zone. The new management zone positive is very close to other positives previously found. Efforts to collect additional samples around the newest positives continue.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries report that 75% of the 1,047 deer collected for CWD testing during the fall of 2002 hunting season were negative for the disease. The remaining samples are still pending.

The results of 92 of 662 samples of white-tailed deer collected in Ohio have been returned and no positives have been found. The remaining 570 test results are expected in the next few weeks.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission reports that the testing of 573 whitetail deer failed to find CWD in the Commonwealth. They are still waiting on the results of 61 hunter-harvested elk that have had samples submitted to NVSL. Since 1998, over 300 suspect deer and elk have been submitted for testing with no indication of the disease found.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has announced that the results of 25 elk and 470 deer sampled for CWD this past fall were negative. The tests were conducted on hunter-harvested animals and submitted to the University of Wyoming Laboratory in Laramie. Additionally, 37 whitetail, 2 mule deer, 4 elk and one fallow deer tested as targeted surveillance animals failed to find the disease in North Dakota. The agency will continue to collect samples from road kills and targeted surveillance animals as well as additional collections during hunting seasons.

A dot blot ELISA test for CWD, developed by VMRD, Inc., has been licensed for CWD testing. The test uses the retropharyngeal lymph nodes and has a turnaround time of approximately 24 hours. Cost for a test kit that will run approximately 960 samples is \$4,300. However, the sensitivity of this test is only 91.5%, which means that about 1 in ten positives may be missed. This is not close enough for accurate monitoring of CWD in populations of wild cervids in the opinion of many wildlife managers. Also, the certification was based on only 298 samples. Additional information on this test is available at the VMRD website: <http://www.vmr.com>.